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SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN CONSULATE PROMOTES CHAVEZ BRAND OF SOCIALISM

CLASSIFIED BY: J. PATRICK TRUHN, CONSUL GENERAL, AMCONGEN
NAPLES, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Venezuela appears to be using its long-dormant Consulate General in Naples as a platform for spreading propaganda on behalf of the Chavez brand of socialism. After leaving the Consul General position vacant for over a year, reflecting Venezuela's apparently minimal interests in southern Italy, the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry recently assigned Bernardo Borges, a petroleum engineer who appears to be in his mid-sixties and is new to the Foreign Ministry, as Consul General in early April. Borges speaks excellent Italian, having earned his geology degree at the University of Parma forty years ago.

¶2. (SBU) After a breakfast meeting in a downtown hotel to introduce himself to the rest of the career consular corps in Naples (the only other Latin American country represented is Panama), we heard nothing from Borges until he invited us to a June 11 symposium at the University of Federico II, entitled "Venezuela: The Search for a New Socialism: Progress, Obstacles and Threats," with Borges billed as the guest of honor. The event was moderated by Professor Giuseppe Cacciatore, who praised Chavez for creating the "perfect constitution" for Venezuela, balancing "basic freedoms" with "practical necessities" of governing in a time of transition. The guest speaker was Italian author and screenwriter Dario Azzellini, who proceeded to give a brief, albeit revisionist history of Venezuela from the 1960s to the present, saying that Chavez is rebuilding the country after it was exploited by "outside forces." Borges, the "guest of honor," lamented that the "global mass media," controlled by a "small group of special interests," is reluctant to publicize Chavez's accomplishments.

¶3. (SBU) The event appears to have been of no public diplomacy significance. It was publicized as a presentation explaining the "difficult experiences in transitioning Venezuelan society to true Socialism," and was attended by only about fifty people, mostly students and self-described "revolutionary" journalists, who presumably already shared the speakers' point of view. The event was not covered in the press.

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